

## **Clean Air**

By Supervisor Gary Ovitt

At the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) meeting last weekend, held at Lake Arrowhead, the Association renewed its call for state and federal officials to address air quality problems in the region.

Last month, I was elected Chairman of the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) for a one-year term. SCAG is the nation's largest metropolitan planning organization, and covers San Bernardino, Riverside, Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura and Imperial Counties. The organization crafts regional plans for transportation, housing and air quality.

I want to make it clear that I'm committed to see to it that the interests of all six counties are balanced and fair and that inland counties are not just the recipient of LA and Orange Counties traffic, smog and affordable housing problems. With a growing population that numbers about 4 million people, the inland counties bear a disproportionate share of highway congestion and pollution. It is the issue of air quality and pollution that needs our immediate attention.

Our region needs relief from polluted air. Earlier last month, SCAG adopted and sent a resolution to President Bush and Governor Schwarzenegger to declare a state of emergency in the region because of the more than 5,400 premature deaths that the state estimates is caused by health conditions linked to air pollution. That doesn't include the thousands of hours of missed work and school attendance.

Along with the California Air Resources Board and the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD), it is SCAG's responsibility to make sure our region complies with the federal Clean Air Act. Earlier last month, an attempt by AQMD to restrict idling by locomotives, failed. Diesel pollution accompanies the movement of goods throughout Southern California. The movement of goods from our ports inland is an economic benefit which we appreciate, but even though this keeps us economically competitive, we pay a price in terms of air pollution and adverse health effects, such as childhood asthma. We can balance both goods movement (40% of all imports in this country come through the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles) and cleaner air.

The Environmental Protection Agency and state Air Resources Board have jurisdiction over cars, trucks, trains, ships and planes, which are the biggest polluters. A major concern is the minuscule flecks generated by diesel emissions, called particulate matter. The smaller the particle, the more dangerous it is. One leading culprit is PM2.5. It is particulate matter that measures 2.5 microns in diameter, roughly one-thirtieth the thickness of a human hair.

I also serve as the San Bernardino County representative on AQMD which has jurisdiction over factories, refineries, and other businesses, but has virtually no authority over vehicles. We tried to restrict idling locomotives but a federal judge threw out the

decision. Next month we hope to adopt a plan to clean the air of particulates by the federally mandated deadline of 2015. We need to meet this deadline and those standards because the current situation is a health care crisis.

By working together the various federal, state, regional and local agencies responsible for reducing air pollution can succeed in making our air cleaner. It won't be easy, painless or cheap however.